

Message Text

PAGE 01 CANBER 05655 01 OF 02 150232Z

67

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /127 W

----- 102303

R 150145Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1830

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CANBERRA 5655

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJ: BACKGROUND TO SPECULATION ON EARLY AUSTRALIAN
GENERAL ELECTIONS

REF: A) CANBERRA 5521 B) CANBERRA 4414

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: POLITICAL SITUATION IN AUSTRALIA
IS DEVELOPING VERY QUICKLY, WITH REAL POSSIBILITY THAT
GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE BEFORE CHRISTMAS OR
IN SPRING OF 1974. PRESENT CONTEXT IS HIGHLY DIS-
ADVANTAGEOUS TO LABOR GOVERNMENT, AND CONSENSUS OF
MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING LABOR FIGURES, IS THAT LABOR
WOULD BE DEFEATED IF ELECTIONS HELD NEAR FUTURE. PRIME
MINISTER WHITLAM'S INTEREST IS IN POSTPONING ELECTIONS
AS LONG AS POSSIBLE OR AT LEAST UNTIL PROSPECTS FOR
LABOR IMPROVE. DECISIVE INDICATION ON ELECTION PROS-
PECTS WILL PROBABLY BE APPARENT IN NEXT WEEK OR 10 DAYS.
END SUMMARY.

2. POLITICAL SITUATION IN AUSTRALIA IS DEVELOPING VERY
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CANBER 05655 01 OF 02 150232Z

QUICKLY, WITH REAL POSSIBILITY THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS
WILL TAKE PLACE BEFORE CHRISTMAS OR IN SPRING OF 1974.
EVENTS MOVING QUICKLY ENOUGH SO THAT NUMBER OF
MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES ARE BEING LEFT SOMEWHAT BEHIND

EVENTS, AS FOL ACCOUNT INDICATES. DECISIVE INDICATION WHETHER ELECTIONS IN PROSPECT IN NEXT TWO MONTHS OR SO WILL PROBABLY BE APPARENT IN NEXT WEEK OR 10 DAYS.

3. IN RETROSPECT, GENERAL TREND IN DOMESTIC AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS OVER PAST 10 MONTHS (REF A), INCLUDING GROWING INFLATION, RASH OF ANNOYING STRIKES, CONCERN OVER CONFUSED MINERALS POLICY OF GOVERNMENT, CONTROVERSY OVER REFERENDA IN DECEMBER ON COMMONWEALTH CONTROL OF PRICES AND INCOMES, AND GENERAL LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE OF LABOR GOVERNMENT, HAS BEEN ADVERSE TO ALP. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, AS REPORTED BY EMBASSY SINCE JUNE, HAVE REFLECTED GNERALLY MEDIOCRE TO POOR IMPRESSION LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS MADE ON AUSTRALIAN VOTING PUBLIC AS A WHOLE. STATE ELECTIONS IN VICOTIRA IN MAY AND FEDERAL PARLIAMETARY BY-ELECTION IN PARAMATTA IN SEPTEMBER SHOWED SAME TREND. LABOR SUFFERED FURTHER SETBACK IN VICTORIA OCT 13 WHEN STATE BY-ELECTION GAVE LIBERALS SEAT PREVIOUSLY HELD BY LABOR BY MASSIVE 2500 VOTE PLURALITY. SEAT WON BY LIBERALS MIN MAY BY FIVE VOTES. MINOR VOTING IRREGULARITIES REQUIRED NEW ELECTION. SWING TO LIBERALS ESTIMATED AT 9PERCENT. LIBERAL LEADER SNEDDEN TERMED RESULT QTE SYMBOLIC OF A GENERAL TREND AGAINST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA. IT MADE CLEAR THAT THE ELECTORS, LIKE THE PEOPLE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA, BELIEVE THE ALP HAS NO CAPACITY TO GOVERN. END QTE.

4. TO PUT A BEGINNING POINT ON PROCESS, LIBERAL PARTY LEADER SNEDDEN NOTED AT LIBERAL COUNCIL MEETING IN SYDNEY AUG 6-8 (REF B) THAT WHEN LABOR WON ELECTIONS IN DEC., 1972, ALP WAS WIDELY PREDICTED TO BE IN OFFICE FOR PERIOD OF YEARS. BY JUNE, 1973, SNEDDEN SAID THAT NO ONE KNEW WHICH PARTY WOULD WIN GENERAL ELECTION. BY AUGUST, 1973, SNEDDEN CHALLENGED ALP TO HOLD EARLY GENERAL ELECTIONS. BY OCTOBER, 1973, PRESSURE OF BUSINESS AND AGRICULTURAL INTERESTS ON CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CANBER 05655 01 OF 02 150232Z

LIBERAL, COUNTRY, AND DLP PARTIES, AS WELL AS APPARENT DISARRAY WITHIN ALP ITSELF, HAVE MADE EARLY ELECTIONS A SERIOUS PROSPECT.

5. IN THIS STILL-DEVELOPING PROCESS THE VARIOUS PARTY INTERESTS HAVE INEVITABLY VARIED, BUT BRIEF REVIEW OF THEM SHOULD CLARIFY WHY SITUATION HAS CHANGED SO QUICKLY.

6. LIBERALS - LIBERAL PARTY LEADER SNEDDEN HAS HAD CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS IN CONSOLIDATING HIS HOLD AS CHIEF FIGURE IN PARTY OVER PAST 10 MONTHS, IN CONTRAST WITH DAMAGING FACTIONAL STRUGGLES WHICH PREVIOUSLY MARKED LIBERALS AND WHICH PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED SIGNI-

FICANTLY TO THEIR DEFEAT IN DECEMBER 1972. UNTIL RECENTLY, HOWEVER, SNEDDEN HAS BEEN TEMPTED TO PUT OFF ELECTORAL TEST UNTIL SPRING OF 1974, ON BASIS THAT SITUATION WOULD EVOLVE FAVORABLY FOR LIBERALS IF DELAY OF SEVERAL MONTHS COULD BE ARRANGED. AT LIBERAL EXECUTIVE MEETING IN CANBERRA OCT 9 SNEDDEN SUCCESSFULLY DELAYED DISCUSSION OF ELECTIONS ISSUE, ASKING MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE TO PUT THEIR VIEWS INDIVIDUALLY TO HIM. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR OCT 10 ANDREW PEACOCK, LIBERAL SPOKESMAN FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SAID HE WOULD RECOMMEND DELAY IN PRESSING FOR ELECTIONS, SINCE LIBERAL PROGRAM AND TACTICS NOT DEVELOPED FOR NEW SITUATION AND SNEDDEN NOT RPT NOT YET FULLY ESTABLISHED AS NATIONAL LEADER. HOWEVER, COUNTRY PARTY, AS NOTED BELOW, HAS DECIDED TO PRESS FOR ELECTIONS, AND LIBERAL PARTY HAS QUIETLY ARRANGED FOR BLITZ SURVEY OF 400 VOTERS IN EACH OF EIGHT MARGINAL ELECTORATES (PRINCIPALLY IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND VICTORIA) TO BE AVAILABLE NEXT FEW DAYS. DECISION BY LIBERALS WHETHER TO PRESS FOR ELECTIONS NOW WILL PROBABLY BE MADE ON BASIS OF RESULTS OF SURVEY, AND WHOLE POLITICAL CONTEXT, AS SEEN OVER NEXT WEEK OR SO.

7. COUNTRY PARTY - COUNTRY PARTY LEADER ANTHONY STATED PUBLICLY OCT 11 HIS PARTY HAD DECIDED UNANIMOUSLY TO PRESS FOR IMMEDIATE ELECTION, BY DEC 8, IF POSSIBLE. COUNTRY PARTY FEELS THAT PRESENT SITUATION, WHEN LABOR IS SEEN BY PUBLIC TO BE PERFORMING IN LACKLUSTER
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CANBER 05655 01 OF 02 150232Z

FASHION, COULD BE PASSING PHENOMENON AND SHOULD BE EXPLOITED TO FULLEST. THIS FITS IN WITH VIEW OF ALP SECRETARY, DAVID COMBE, WHO COMMENTED PRIVATELY TO EMBOFF OCT 10 THAT IF ELECTIONS HELD AT ONCE, ALP WOULD LOSE BY LARGE MARGIN, AND ENSUING LIBERAL-COUNTRY GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY LARGER MAJORITY THAN EIGHT SEAT MARGIN NOW HELD BY ALP OVER OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, COMBE SAID THAT ELECTIONS COULD NOT BE BROUGHT OFF FOR TWO MONTHS OR SO, THAT SITUATION COULD CHANGE SUBSTANTIALLY (E.G., STRIKES COULD SUBSIDE, RATE OF INFLATION COULD DECLINE), AND THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM WOULD PROBABLY PERFORM TO MUCH GREATER ADVANTAGE DURING CAMPAIGN THAN LIBERAL LEADER SNEDDEN.

8. DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY - DLP FACES PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM OVER NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. PARTY BROKE OFF FROM ALP IN 1955 AND HAS SINCE FOLLOWED STRATEGY OF HOLDING ALP OUT OF POWER UNTIL LABOR BROKE WITH ITS FAR LEFT ELEMENTS AND AGAIN BECAME ACCEPTABLE PARTNER. DLP WOULD THEN REJOIN IT AND THUS CREATE RELATIVELY STABLE LABOR MAJORITY. DLP STRATEGY WAS SEEN FINALLY TO HAVE FAILED IN 1972, WHEN ALP

WON GOVERNMENT DESPITE DLP OPPOSITION. MEANWHILE, ALP HAS ADOPTED RANGE OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POLICIES WHICH SO ANTITHETICAL TO DLP THAT FUTURE REUNION NOW VIRTUALLY EXCLUDED. DLP HAS NO REPRESENTATION IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BUT HAS FIVE SEATS IN SENATE, WHERE ITS VOTES ARE CRITICAL ELEMENT IN BLOCKING FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF ALP POLICIES. HOWEVER, IN SENATE ELECTIONS (FOR 30 MEMBERS OF 60-MEMBER BODY) WHICH MUST BE HELD

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 CANBER 05655 02 OF 02 150246Z

67

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /127 W

----- 102341

R 150145Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1831

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CANBERRA 5655

NO LATER THAN MAY, 1974, THREE DLP SENATORS ARE UP FOR RE-ELECTION UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ARE UNFAVORABLE TO THEM. LABOR GOVERNMENT COULD ONLY BE BROUGHT DOWN IN NEXT FEW WEEKS OR MONTHS WITH COOPERATION OF DLP, WHICH IS UNLIKELY UNLESS LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES ARE PREPARED TO DO A DEAL (E.G., A JOINT SENATE SLATE ENSURING RE-ELECTION OF DLP SENATORS). IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF OCT 9 SENATOR MCMANUS (WHO WAS ELECTED DLP LEADER OCT 10, REPLACING RETIRING LEADER SENATOR GAIR) SAID HE THOUGHT GENERAL ELECTIONS BEFORE END OF 1973 WERE UNLIKELY THOUGH NOT TO BE EXCLUDED BUT THAT GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1974, PARTICULARLY IN FEBRUARY OR MARCH, WERE ALMOST INEVITABLE. IN STATEMENT TO PRESS OCT 11 MCMANUS SAID VIEWS OF DLP STATE BRANCHES HAD BEEN REQUESTED ON ISSUE OF FORCING EARLY ELECTIONS, AND HE ANTICIPATED DLP DECISION WOULD BE ANNOUNCED OCT 17.

9. AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY - GOVERNMENT PARTY HAS BEEN THROUGH A DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE IN PAST TWO MONTHS, WITH STRIKES, INFLATION, AND PARTY FACTIONALISM DOING CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE. DESPITE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND ACTU ON DECEMBER 8 REFERENDUM ON PROVIDING

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT WITH PRICES AND INCOMES CONTROL,
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CANBER 05655 02 OF 02 150246Z

ALP FEDERAL EXECUTIVE MEETING IN ADELAIDE OCT 5-6 WENT OFF CALMLY, AND PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM OBTAINED APPROVAL OF BOTH REFERENDUM ISSUES BY 10-7 MARGIN. THIS IS ONLY A TEMPORARY VICTORY, HOWEVER, AS ACTU FEDERAL EXECUTIVE, WHICH WILL MEET OCT 15, ALMOST CERTAIN TO RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF REFERENDUM ON PRICE CONTROL BUT REJECTION OF INCOMES CONTROL. INCOMES CONTROL REFERENDUM ALMOST CERTAIN TO LOSE AND PRICES CONTROL REFERENDUM MAY ALSO BE DEFEATED. ON GENERAL ELECTIONS, LATEST MORGAN GALLUP POLL, TAKEN IN EARLY OCTOBER, SHOWED THAT ALP HAD 44PERCENT OF VOTE, WHILE LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES HAD 47PERCENT OF VOTE. SAME POLL SHOWED DLP AND AUSTRALIA PARTY EACH HAD 4PERCENT OF VOTE, WITH RESULT THAT IF ELECTIONS HAD BEEN HELD IN EARLY OCTOBER AND IF POLL SAMPLE WERE CORRECT (MORGAN GALLUP POLL HAS HAD EXCELLENT RECORD FOR ACCURACY), LIBERAL-COUNTRY COALITION WOULD HAVE BEEN RETURNED TO POWER WITH APPROXIMATELY THE SEVEN SEAT MAJORITY IT HAD FROM 1969 TO 1972. AS NOTED ABOVE, THIS IS MORE CONSERVATIVE OUTCOME THAN ALP SECRETARY COMBE PREDICTED TO EMBOFF OCT 10. ALP INTEREST LIES IN POSTPONING ELECTIONS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE IN HOPE PRESENT, ADVERSE SITUATION WILL IMPROVE.

10. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS - NOT MENTIONED IN ABOVE DISCUSSION IS IMPACT STATE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA COULD HAVE. BOTH MUST BE HELD IN NEXT SIX MONTHS OR SO. LIBERALS ARE VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO WIN IN NEW SOUTH WALES, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF WIDESPREAD PUBLIC ANNOYANCE AT CURRENT RASH OF AIRLINE AND POWER STRIKES IN STATE. MOREOVER, LIBERAL LEADER AND STATE PREMIER IN NSW, SIR ROBERT ASKIN, IS IN POOR HEALTH (HE HAD RECENT HEART ATTACK) AND WANTS TO WIN ELECTION AND RETIRE AS SOON AS HE CAN ARRANGE TO DO SO. HE CURRENTLY PLANS TO CALL STATE ELECTIONS AS SOON AS QUEEN ELIZABETH LEAVE AUSTRALIA OCTOBER 22. COMMENTING TO THE PRESS OCT 14, ASKIN INDICATED HE WOULD PROBABLY CHOOSE BETWEEN A DATE IN NOVEMBER AND IN FEBRUARY. NSW STATE ELECTIONS CANNOT BE HELD FOR AT LEAST FOUR WEEKS AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT. IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, STATE PREMIER TONKIN (ALP) IS
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CANBER 05655 02 OF 02 150246Z

IN VULNERABLE POSITION, AND STATE LIBERAL LEADER, SIR CHARLES COURT, WANTS EARLY ELECTIONS, ACCORDING TO LIBERAL PARTY SECRETARIAT OFFICIAL. COURT WOULD HAVE BROUGHT ELECTIONS ON IN PAST WEEK (THROUGH REJECTING

STATE LABOR GOVERNMENT BUDGET BILL) IF PROSPECT OF FEDERAL ELECTIONS HAD NOT ASSUMED RENEWED LIFE. LIBERAL PARTY, IN DECIDING ON WHETHER TO PRESS FOR FEDERAL ELECTIONS, WILL HAVE TO DECIDE ON TIMING OF ELECTIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA, AS WELL AS AT FEDERAL LEVEL. REFERENDUM ON PRICES AND INCOMES, DUE TO BE HELD DECEMBER 8, IS A CONSIDERATION BUT IS ONLY A MONOR DISTRACTION.

11. TACTICS - BRINGING DOWN FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD REQUIRE SENATE TO REJECT BUDGET BILL (ENTITLED APPROPRIATIONS BILL NO. 1) IN NEXT FEW WEEKS. GOA PRESENTLY OPERATES UNDER QTE SUPPLY BILL END QTE WHICH PASSED LAST MAY AND WHICH IS SIMILAR IN EFFECT TO CONTINUING RESOLUTION AUTHORITY IN U.S. SUPPLY BILL PROVIDES FUNDS TO END OF NOVEMBER, 1973, WITH EXPENDITURES DURING REST OF FY1974 (AUSTRALIAN FISCAL YEAR BEGINS JULY 1, AS DOES U.S. FISCAL YEAR) TO BE COVERED BY REGULAR APPROPRIATIONS BILL NOW BEFORE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT. IF LIBERAL, COUNTRY, AND DLP AGREE TO FORCE PACE, APPROPRIATIONS BILL COULD BE REJECTED IN SENATE IN NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS, GOVERNMENT WOULD BE FORCED TO RESIGN, AND ELECTIONS IN EARLY DECEMBER (PROBABLY ON DECEMBER 8, SIMULTANEOUS WITH REFERENDUM) WOULD BECOME INEVITABLE. IF LIBERAL, COUNTRY, AND DLP CANNOT AGREE OR DECIDE TO PUT OFF DECISION TILL NEXT YEAR, SAME OPPORTUNITY WILL COME UP WHEN SUPPLY BILL (I.E., CONTINUING RESOLUTION) CONSIDERED IN PARLIAMENT IN APRIL-MAY. ELECTIONS IN MAY, PRESUMABLY INVOLVING BOTH HOUSE AND SENATE, WOULD THEN TAKE PLACE. LABOR GOVERNMENT, FOR ITS PART, COULD DELAY BRINGING APPROPRIATIONS BILL TO SENATE UNTIL LATE NOVEMBER, MAKING DECEMBER ELECTIONS IMPOSSIBLE TO ORGANIZE IN SHORT TIME AVAILABLE.

12. COMMENT: ONLY MAJOR CHANGE IN COURSE OF EVENTS AS NOW APPARENT WILL HOLD OFF EARLY ELECTIONS. POSSIBLE
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CANBER 05655 02 OF 02 150246Z

THAT LIBERALS WILL CONTINUE TO OPT FOR SAFE COURSE, POSTPONING ELECTIONS TILL 1974 IN INTERESTS OF MINIMIZING RISKS AND MAXIMIZING THEIR ELECTORAL PROSPECTS. ALSO POSSIBLE THAT PROCESS OF ARRANGING SATISFACTORY DEAL WITH DLP ON SENATE ELECTIONS WILL TAKE MORE TIME THAN NEXT FEW WEEKS ALLOW AND THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE POSTPONED UNTIL SPRING OF 1974. PERIOD FROM APPROXIMATELY MID-DECEMBER TO END OF JANUARY IS SACRED AUSTRALIAN SUMMER HOLIDAY PERIOD, AND NO POLITICAL PARTY IS PREPARED TO CONTEMPLATE HOLDING ELECTIONS AT THAT TIME.
GREEN

CONFIDENTIAL

<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 11 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS, GENERAL STRIKES, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 OCT 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: thigpegh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973CANBER05655
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731065/abqceeqt.tel
Line Count: 326
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A) CANBERRA 5521 B) CANBERRA 4414
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: thigpegh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 OCT 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16-Oct-2001 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <30-Nov-2001 by thigpegh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BACKGROUND TO SPECULATION ON EARLY AUSTRALIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS
TAGS: PINT, AS
To: STATE INFO WELLINGTON
CINCPAC
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005